

To: Montgomery County Councilmembers

Re: Bill 18-22, Noise Control – Leaf Removal Equipment - Amendments

Subj: Testimony submitted by Ms. Roberta G Steinman

Date: July xx, 2022

I support a ban on the sale and use of combustion engine-powered leaf blowers and leaf vacuums in Montgomery County

Banning the use of Gas-powered leaf blowers will improve air quality, reduce noise pollution, and bring some peace back into our neighborhoods.

Gas leaf blowers have become a persistent source of air and noise pollution. We hear their loud, high-pitched noise from mid- to late February each year until the following January. Additionally, pollution from leaf blowers compounds leads directly to other forms of air pollution. When gas leaf blowers are operating in full force in our neighborhood, we must **close our doors and windows** instead of simply allowing the fresh air and breeze to cool our homes. My husband and I spend a lot of time outdoors because we are native plant and vegetable gardeners, and there is always outdoor work to do. The gas-powered leaf blowers make working outdoors unpleasant, nerve wracking, and dangerous. The fumes and dust are toxic both for us and for the pollinators, and the toxic dust and pollution settles on the plants. As a result, we race back inside every time the blowers show up in our vicinity.

The **health consequences of breathing polluted air affects all – regardless of age, race, socioeconomic demographic, or species**. Everyone in our neighborhood – human or non-human – is harmed by both the noise and the breathing of the exhaust of unnecessary leaf blowers. I live in a walkable neighborhood where many people enjoy being outdoors - walking, running, pushing babies in stroller, walking the dog, and taking their daily exercise regimen. But that pleasurable and healthful activity has become so unpleasant due to the pollution and noise from the omnipresent gas-powered leaf blowers that we are forced to severely alter or curtail that activity altogether.

Gas-powered blowers produce double the number of decibels and have a lower sound frequency than electric leaf blowers. Because they cause high levels of sound at low frequencies, the roar of gas blowers can be heard 23 houses away from a lawn that's being blown, whereas the sound of electric blowers only will travel six houses away. There are so many eco-friendly alternatives, including electric blowers, rakes, and leaving the leaves on the ground.

But it doesn't adversely affect just we humans. The environmental effects of blower noise, dust, and particulate matter causes birds, frogs, pollinating insects and other creatures to vacate the area, which is detrimental to our local ecosystems.

In addition to negative effects on the environment, the noise and toxic fumes generated by gas-powered blowers impact the health and safety of workers who use them on the job. Landscape workers and others may experience hearing loss and respiratory problems due to extensive exposure to two-stroke, engine-driven leaf blowers.

Some landscaping companies argue that going green and using electric power tools will slightly reduce their efficiency and make them less competitive. This is precisely why a ban will be so beneficial, as it will level the playing field across all companies and not allow a small number of free-riders to profit from the good will of ecofriendly companies.

It's time for Montgomery County (and the state of Maryland) to join communities across the U.S. and ban the sale and use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers.¹ Gas blowers emit hydrocarbons at rates up to nine times higher than those generated by electric blowers. It's estimated that using a commercial leaf blower for one hour emits as much pollution as driving a 2016 Toyota Camry from D.C. to Miami. One study showed that a leaf blower's two-stroke engine can produce nearly 300 times the hydrocarbon emissions of a pickup truck, as well as much more toxic carbon monoxide and nitrous oxide fumes.

It is time to act. Our health, the air we breathe, our well-being is simply more important than the 'illusory' efficiency of gas-powered blowers. I say 'illusory' because the use of these devices does not factor in their substantial external adverse impacts.

Let's get on with this ban and bring peace and quiet and civility back into our neighborhoods.

Thank you.
Respectfully submitted
Ms. Roberta G Steinman

¹ Over 20 cities in California have completely banned all gas-powered leaf blowers and the results have been entirely positive. The bans are reported as being 90 – 95% enforceable, of little burden to enforce, and citizen satisfaction with the bans is reported to be as high as 100%. (<https://mont.thesentinel.com/2019/05/02/american-lung-association-moco-air-is-unhealthy/>)